

A MEMORANDUM FOR STUDENTS OF THE PROFESSION OF ARMS**on****PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Major General John R. Allen, USMC

1. The significance of personal professional development

Learning our profession ... the profession of arms ... must be a lifelong and abiding pursuit for the professional serving officer. There can be no equal to, and indeed no substitute for, the officer who has spent a career immersed in the study of the art and science of war. An officer will likely spend no more than three and half years in formal, resident professional military education (PME) over a twenty-year career. With the preponderance of our time split between the operating forces, the support establishment, and "B" billets, we must assume the responsibility and provide for our own development. Unfortunately, unit level PME programs wax and wane based on commanders' predilections and experience, and operational commitments or other periodic interruptions. Only the individual officer can be fully in charge of his or her professional development.

2. Where to start

a. *Non-resident professional military education.* After graduation from USNA, you will find opportunities for Navy or Marine Corps sponsored education. Keep an eye out for them and always strive to be a part of a non-resident PME program. This type of study is also known as distance learning or correspondence training. The Marine Corps Institute is an example of a distance learning school and offers myriad courses across many fields and functions in the Marine Corps.

b. *Professional Reading List.* Along with this document, I have published a reading list for you. It is divided into a core group, a list for each class, and a list for service-selection-specific books. I challenge each of you to read at least one of these books a year to help improve your overall professional base.

c. *The Marine Corps Commandant's Reading List.* In 1989, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Al Gray, published the first edition of the Commandant's Reading List, a compilation of books intended to focus the professional reading efforts of the entire Marine Corps. Organized vertically by rank and horizontally by subject matter, the reading list is a "first stop" for Marines seeking to read subject matter on issues critical to their professional development for their particular rank or grade.

<http://home.comcast.net/%7Eantaylor1/usmccommandant.html>

(D)

d. *The Chief of Naval Operations Reading List.* Available at:

<http://www.navyreading.navy.mil/Default.aspx>

e. *Individual reading and personal professional study ... seek your answers in history.* Jay Luvaas, the great American and Civil War historian, once said, "There is no excuse among professional officers for not having a 5000 year old mind." What he meant was across the sweep of recorded time, the literature of war lays at our feet nearly the sum total of man's warfare experience. In these works, there are lessons to be found that provide guideposts for virtually every challenge or dilemma we may encounter on the modern battlefield; new technologies notwithstanding. Additionally, reading provides us vicarious experience about war, experience which, in a very real sense, can serve as personal sense of conflict. One of the great military

educators of the 20th Century, British Major General J.F.C. Fuller counseled the serving officer to read history. He said:

"Here history can help us, and in place of being looked upon as a clay pit to dig brick out of it should be considered an inexhaustible quarry of psychological ore. It does not really matter much what a certain general did at a certain date, but what is [emphasis his] of importance is -why [emphasis his] he did it in a certain set of circumstances. The object of education is not so much to discover 'what to think' as to learn 'how to think'."

Adolph Von Schell the German officer student, who attended American Army schools during the inter-war years, said it best when he observed in 1931:

"This problem [coping with the mental struggles of battle] will be even more serious in future wars, when machinery rules the battlefield, than it was in the past. In peace maneuvers, such matters cannot be depicted. We can learn only from experience or by analogy from searching military history. As leaders, we must constantly seek some means to prepare our soldiers for these grave psychological blows that war strikes at morale and nerves."

The remainder of this paper will address personal professional reading and study. I provide these thoughts as a distillation of my own thinking on the subject and offer some techniques for professional reading assembled from the over 30 years I have dedicated my life to this study. Remember, these are all just the ideas of one student of the art of war. Many times over the years I have said to myself "... if I'd just known this," or "... had I just done that," I would have been so much better prepared, not just as a serving officer, but also as a lifelong student of the art of war. In many cases these lessons would have been immediately obvious to me had I been more thoroughly engaged a program of personal professional reading.

3. Individual Reading

a. *Choose a strategic direction.* Seek a general or strategic direction for your reading, something of interest. ... something of value from the profession of arms. I choose my reading across three general areas, all of them related to my strategic direction: decision making in combat. The three areas that contribute most to my strategic direction are maneuver warfare studies, readings in character in decision making, and human factors in combat. My purpose in this paragraph is not to convince you of this, or any particular strategic direction. This one, with its three components, suits me; something else will suit each other officer in his or her reading. I chose this direction early in my career because I thought it would directly impact my professional needs. It has sustained me throughout my professional development, but unfortunately I came at the idea of a strategic direction relatively late in my career. I would simply offer the observation that one's strategic direction should be carefully selected to account for the requirement for long term professional education while supporting short-term technical, tactical, and spiritual needs.

b. *Objective based reading.* Just as we would do a reconnaissance before crossing the line of departure in the attack, I carefully examine every book before I launch into the reading. Given the limited time I have available, reading is a significant commitment for me and I "choose my battles" carefully. Before descending into the subject matter, ask yourself the following questions:

1. *Does this book constitute part of the body of literature for my strategic direction?*
2. *If it does, when I'm done, what do I seek to get out of this particular book?*

I establish a professional objective, or objectives, for each book I read. Each objective is derived from, or contributes to, the context of my strategic direction. As an example, I once read Simpkin's *Race to the Swift*. Simpkin writes about maneuver warfare in a scientific manner, explaining aspects of the tactics in physical terms. I found the book very useful for me, as I had been educated at the undergraduate level as an operations analyst, and tended to view the world in quantitative terms. I established an objective for this book to aid me in bridging the inherently qualitative discussion of maneuver warfare with the quantitative nature of my education. In the end, it was excellent in placing some of the larger principles of maneuver warfare and high mobility operations squarely into a context I understood. Thus, before I began the serious reading of *Race to the Swift* I understood how it would fit into my strategic direction, by helping me to understand and to apply maneuver warfare principles in a tactical and a technical manner.

c. *Choose the author carefully.* A related point to choosing the "right" book is choosing the "right" the author. As with books, not all authors are created equal. If I am going to invest the time to read, I will spend no small amount of effort considering the author as well as the title. Pose yourself the questions:

1. *Why is this author writing on this subject? Is there an agenda?*
2. *How much original research is contained herein, or is this simply a regurgitation of past work?*

A great Marine leader and scholar once told me I could not go wrong reading everything written by J. F. C. Fuller and B. H. Liddell-Hart. For years I have collected their works, and I must say early in my studies of maneuver warfare and human factors in war, they shaped my thinking and were instrumental in helping me create a "lens" through which I would thereafter always view conflict. The authors who have made a difference for me in my professional reading are many, but some who have had a profound affect upon me are: G. F. R. Henderson, Douglas Southall Freeman, S. L. A. Marshall, Steven Ambrose, Russ Weigley, Barbara Tuchman, John Keegan, Michael Howard, Martin Van Creveld, Al Millett, Williamson Murray, and John W. Thomason.

There are so many, and I am reluctant to mention even one for fear of neglecting or injuring another, except to offer to new readers in professional military studies some assurance and hope that they need not consider the relative "worth" of any one of these writers very long before deciding their work might fit their own strategic directions. If my house were on fire and we were all running for our lives, I would first save my family, and then all my volumes by these writers. Bottomline: the author is as important as the work itself, and I counsel you to choose the two carefully... *and together*.

Let me make a related point about the author. Every book an officer reads effects a subtle, nearly imperceptible change in our makeup: our vocabulary is enhanced, our knowledge of sentence construction and composition improves, which translates directly into improved communications skills. Simply put, a reader is a scholar. If my own speech and writing seem a bit "heavy" it is because I have been reading the British inter-war authors and Douglas Southall Freeman for years. The echoes of their words and their thought processes can be found ... if usually poorly rendered ... in my own communications. The author will not only shape a student's lens, the officer will be changed forever, intellectually, by the influence. An officer would be well advised to select that kind of change very carefully.

d. *Study a campaign.* Without any structure, officers often wander for years over the landscape of military literature. This lack of focus, suffering from a literal "aimlessness," inhibits concentration and serves to dissipate the energy of a useful study of the art of war. Selecting a military campaign offers the student an endless variation and combination of case studies for one's own strategic direction. A serious campaign study affords the student the opportunity to study many different aspects of war: levels of war (strategic, operational, tactical); leadership at every level; the effects of human factors in combat; decision-making under pressure and duress; and such functional issues as logistics, communications, transportation, engineering, medical, casualty replacement, cavalry operations, etc.

Many campaigns will also permit studies in socio-political, civil-military, and political-military issues. For years, I have studied General Robert E. Lee's Southern Maryland Campaign of 1862, culminating in the Battle of Sharpsburg (Antietam). With the exception of the effects of modern weapons, I have found the answers to virtually every question I have asked about the profession of arms and the study of the art of war in the literature surrounding the Southern Maryland Campaign. The advantage of studying a single campaign is the student builds continuity in context ... that is, familiarity ... with the subject matter at hand, and will come to know the leaders and their personalities, the terrain, the conditions of battle, the units, the successes, and the failures, etc. Having concentrated on one campaign, I have not been forced to relearn all the timeless nuances of battle with each new book or situation I read. In some form or fashion, every author who writes on this campaign will deal with the same issues. This approach offers continuity and reinforcement.

Why did I choose the Southern Maryland Campaign? The body of literature surrounding this war in general and this battle in particular, is huge and begins with the *Official Records of the Civil War*. I would caution the student this last consideration, the size of the body of literature surrounding a campaign should be one of the principal determining factors in selecting a campaign. The more the writing, the more and varied are the facets available for study.

e. *Why study the American Civil War?* It is useful at this point to digress for a moment and discuss the issue of the study American Civil War by a serving officer of the 21st Century. I am partial to Civil War studies for several reasons. First, as I have already mentioned, the body of literature surrounding this conflict is great; at this point the published works number in excess of 70,000 volumes consisting of personal memoirs, unit histories, battle and campaign studies, etc. Second, the post-war Federal Government, sensing the need to preserve records of this enormous American struggle, commissioned an official effort to assemble and organize all of the available documentation. Commissioners from both the Union and the former Confederate armies participated in this effort and the result was a staggering assembly of documents published in 129 volumes from 1888-1901, known thereafter as *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the official records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. Today, researchers call them the *Official Records of the Civil War* or simply the "OR." These resources are a matchless record of the orders, reports, and evaluations of both sides. All written in English, these records represent one of the finest recorded assemblies of the writings of *both* belligerents in any conflict at any time in history. A researcher need not speak a foreign language, nor rely on someone else's translation in order to delve deeply into this conflict.

Unfortunately, few of us can maintain this kind of library (since each of the volumes of the OR measures well in excess of 600 pages). However, Guild Press of Indiana has now published the sum total of these 129 volumes, plus Dyer's *Compendium of the War of the*

Rebellion plus Fox's *Regimental Losses in the American Civil War* all in one CD for about \$65 (<http://www.guildpress.com>) [this is not an endorsement of this product by the Naval Academy or the Navy or Marine Corps]. A naval version of the OR was also assembled in about 60 volumes and it is also now available from Guild Press. Finally, as an officer, I know I will return to Quantico and the Washington, D.C. area on numerous occasions throughout my career. Near these two locations are most of the large battlefields of the Eastern Theater of Operations of the Civil War. To walk the ground of these battlefields, with the writings and the maps of both sides, offers an incomparable opportunity to study the art of war at nearly the "molecular" level of detail.

f. *Don't force a book.* Ben Johnson once said: "Some books are to be chewed and digested..." meaning some books will simply not be easy to read. Once a student has selected those authors with whom he or she is comfortable, then the reading eventually becomes easier and more predictable. But on occasion, a student will select a book that just "reads hard." My advice when a student is laboring through a book is simply to put it down. Unless it is part of an academic assignment, don't force the reading; it may not be time yet for the student to grasp the material. This subject matter may yet be too advanced, or the writing style too difficult to accommodate learning at this particular moment. Get another book by a different, credible author on a similar subject, and try again. I have found, over the years that "going around" a literary surface often set me up for success at a later point in the previous book. Time for professional reading is simply too precious a commodity to the student engaged in serious personal professional development. Grinding through a book can be too costly in terms of time, and the waste of valuable, irreplaceable enthusiasm.

g. *Look for the references.* When I choose a book in the context of my strategic direction, I will frequently spend some time in the notes (foot or endnotes) and bibliography of the book before I commit to reading. With regard to notes, as I proceed through a book I usually use two bookmarks. One keeps my place in the text of the book, while one helps me track my progress through the notes. Most of the great writers were also great researchers, and their books are replete with notes containing research insights and additional information deemed important, but not sufficiently so, to appear in the text proper. Two examples of this achievement are Coddington's, *The Campaign of Gettysburg*, and English's and Gudmundsson's, *On Infantry*. Coddington's book contains over 300 pages of endnotes that paint a brilliant picture of the peripheral aspects of the campaign. The additional information, and the opinions expressed in the "second book within a book" made this work a true treasure for the comprehensive study of this battle.

Similarly, I have read *On Infantry* at every rank since it was first published in 1981. Its endnotes are one of the most useful assemblages of additional information on infantry and small unit cohesion and operations I have found in any book I have ever read. Because of their content, and the way they are arranged, these notes and references have taught me something new from this book each time I read it. Those who read and do not select a book for its notes, or worse read a book and ignore the notes, miss the sometimes-crucial "inner book."

In addition, for the serious student of an event, battle, or leader, the bibliography is pure gold, mined by the author and presented here simply for the cost of the book. The notes and bibliography complete the literature. There is however, one exception to this rule. Many of the greatest historians who have contributed to the body of literature on war have been "narrative historians," men and women who weave the threads of history as a great story. These historians, among them Samuel Eliot Morrison and Shelby Foote, write with wonderful clarity of thought,

enthraling the reader in the story line, but provide few notes, or perhaps even bibliographies. For the student this may not matter, for I personally love narrative history, unless I contemplate some additional research.

h. *Marking a book and using marginalia?* For years I have watched officers mark and annotate their books as they have attempted to highlight something important on a page. I have seen pages literally covered with yellow highlighter pen or completely underlined. Let me offer the "vertical bar" technique. As one reads the text, if something important appears, place a single vertical bar in margin spanning the relevant lines of text. Of the text deemed important enough to be set-off with a vertical bar, the single vertical bar is important text; two vertical parallel lines sets-off the next most important text on the page. Finally, the most important text on a page, something perhaps so important one would consider memorizing it or committing it to a note card, is annotated with three parallel vertical bars. This text, set-off with three vertical bars, is "pure gold" and represents the essence of the principal points to be taken from this portion of the book.

As the name implies, marginalia can be written in the margin immediately adjacent to (D the particular passage, or may be written as a "call away," set-off using an asterisk in the text and writing the note on the top or bottom of that page, or can be written at the end of the chapter in white space frequently found there. Marginalia is a snapshot in time of the student's thinking on the subject at hand, and provides a student a valuable record of his or her impressions of the text for future reference or research. For those who collect books, let me caution marginalia can cause a significant loss in value in first editions or rare volumes. That is not to say don't write in these kinds of books. Simply recognize the cost of marginalia in devaluing the monetary worth of certain books.

4. Summary.

We must be lifelong students of the profession of arms. That term carries certain obligations, the most important of which is to be ready for war. That readiness flows from the obligation to study the art of war in a constant, systematic and long-term manner. Some of our development will occur in the schools we attend. Some will occur in the PME programs of our units. The preponderance, however, must occur as a result of our own volition and initiative to study. A leader is a reader. A reader is a scholar. A scholar is a communicator. The one flows into the other with all these qualities being inter-related. In the end they find their most urgent expression in battle. When we reach the point of impact ...on whatever battlefield that may be ...the officer who will prevail is one for whom the study of the art of war has been an abiding, personal, and lifelong search. The officer with the 500-year-old mind will win.

Good hunting and Semper Fidelis.